

Honor Earth Day by Reusing Old Clothing

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Spring is the best time to empty our closets of clothing we'll never (or shouldn't) wear again. Some of it can be donated or even sold, but what about the pieces that are flawed or frayed? Don't be too quick to toss these items into the trash. Instead salvage usable fabric, buttons, and zippers. Even thrift stores cut the buttons off of unusable clothing and sell them. Read on for some reuse ideas and how we took four men's shirts with various resale deal-breaker flaws and made a simple sweet baby quilt.

No one wants a shirt with a worn collar, a sweatshirt with a spaghetti sauce stain, or a sweater with a moth hole. So into the garbage they go. Not so fast. While you can't save every piece, most still have usable parts and pieces that can avoid the landfill and save you dollars in the future.

Divide and Conquer

- Go through your closets and pull out everything you don't want to wear again for whatever reason: size, style or damage.
- Make a stack to donate (or take to a resale shop).
- What remains is your opportunity pile.

TIP: Keep a basket in your closet to store clothing that is no longer something you'll wear. Don't put it back in the drawer or re-hang. When the basket is full, deal with it. It will free up space and you won't have to rethink your discard decision.

Sort Your Opportunity Pile

- **Sweatshirts and sweatpants** make great cleaning and polishing rags. All-cotton is best. Cut up into usable sections, removing seams. These soft rags will also help you reduce your reliance on paper towels for cleanup. Save working zippers – long heavy-duty zippers are expensive to buy and can be sized down as needed for future projects.
- **Blankets and sheets**, while not clothing, are included because they are the other other big source of reusable household fabric. Blankets with holes or worn edges can be made into smaller blankets or used as backing for small

quilts. Simply bind the edges with pretty cotton prints. Cut blankets into the largest pieces you can for storage. Sheets can be turned into clothing, or made into soft [pillowcases](#) or quilt backs.

- **Jeans** that are beyond a desirable 'destroyed' look, can be cut to make shorts. If the top part is usable, it can also be turned into a trendy skirt by adding a simple gathered length of soft cotton or chiffon. At the very least, save the heavy duty zippers! They can be reused in future sewing or repair projects and also be rolled into zipper flowers you can use to embellish a little clutch or used as a brooch. Jean jackets can be turned into [pillows](#), or cut short for a cropped fit – let the edges fray in the wash.
- **Woven shirts** wear unevenly. Most have perfectly good, and often beautiful fabric that can be reused in many ways. They are lovely for making quilts. Small pieces are perfect for doll clothes or fabric for children to use in sewing. Be sure to save the buttons. Buttons come in handy if you need to replace one that is lost, but they also can be used as embellishment as we did on our [table topper](#).
TIP: before you cut off the fabric content tag, separate into cotton, cotton-poly blend, silk, rayon, etc.
- **T-Shirts** can be turned into soft quilts and pillows. If they have a graphic, it makes it that much more interesting and can become a memory quilt of sorts. Knits make great clothing for children; you can salvage a lot of fabric from an adult tee. The softest cleaning cloths come from old t-shirts. There are companies that turn old white tees into cleaning rags and sell by the box; check your recycling center for options.
- **Sweaters** with moth holes can be repaired if you really love the sweater. If not, many people are searching for old wool sweaters for felting. Felting in a hot washer/dryer process causes most holes disappear. So, don't be too sure you can't donate these.
- **Socks** can achieve that second life too. When traveling, slide your shoes or flip flops into old socks. Old cotton socks slip over your hand to make quick dust cloths. As known escape artists, socks often become loners and the really cute ones can become sock puppets, storage bags and jar cozies.
- **Belts** made of webbing and leather have many uses in future bags as shoulder straps, or to roll up a stadium blanket. Cut down to make children's belts. If the belt is shot, keep the hardware and use it to remake a simple belt from [new webbing](#).

Men's Shirt Baby Quilt

During the Great Depression, people didn't throw anything away. My own grandmother learned lifelong habits from those days. She made many truly gorgeous quilts from old clothing, rarely bought a new button, and made use of every inch of the embroidery floss she so prolifically used. For years, I had a quilt on my bed that she'd made from discards. I used to look at it and try to guess what the little patches had been. Pillows, table runners, napkins – most had a past life. After years of being a throw-away society, it's time to get some of the old reuse mentality back into our everyday thinking.



In honor of Earth Day, we took four men's shirts in shades of blue (three long-sleeve and one short sleeve) and cut them into 7" x 7" squares. The backing fabric is a section of an old flannel sheet.

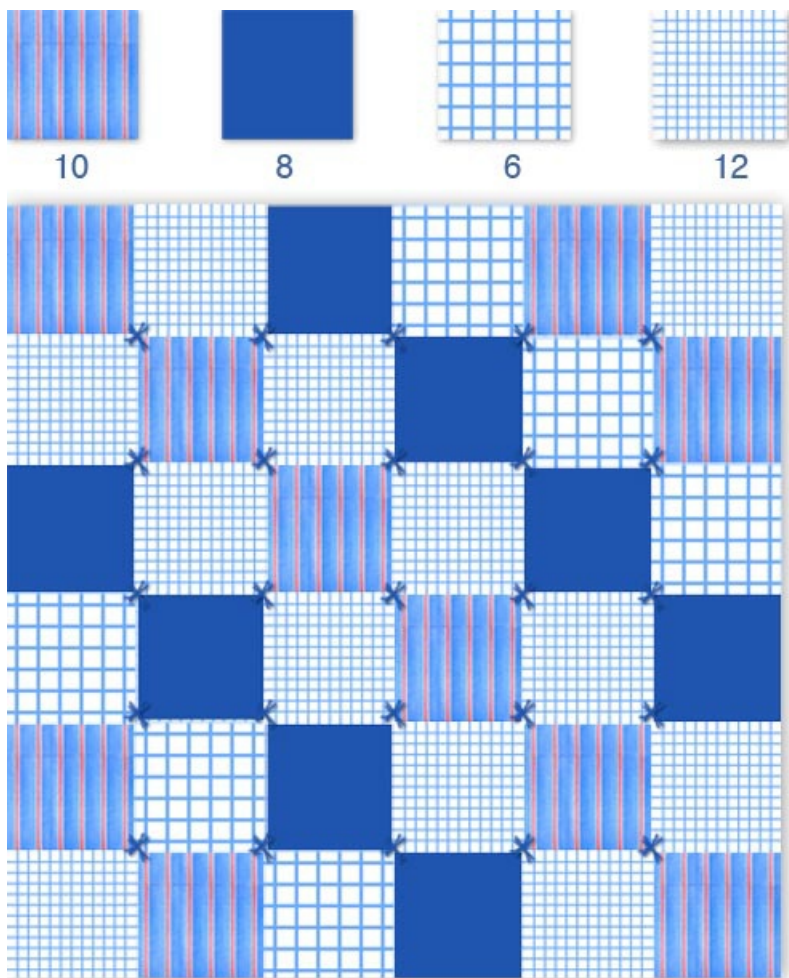


Save the buttons for future projects.



Each of these shirts had problems, worn cuffs and/or collars, torn seam, ink stains, etc. Yet, there was plenty of like-new fabric to make a sweet baby quilt. In fact, these four shirts produced enough fabric to make two baby quilts.

This is a simple patchwork using an old flannel sheet for backing. Cut thirty-six 7" x 7" squares. Patchwork together using a 1/2" seam allowance, following our pattern or one of your choice. This will make a 36-inch square quilt. You can, however, make it as large or small as you'd like by changing the number of rows.



With right sides facing, pin patchwork and flannel together. Sew around the edges using a $\frac{1}{2}$ " seam allowance, leaving a gap of about 4" for turning. Turn and press, slipstitch opening closed.

Add a tie at each patchwork intersection, using embroidery floss. Double-knot and clip excess floss to about $\frac{1}{2}$ " from the knot.





You can also follow the instructions in our [baby blanket](#) tutorials.

Add Your Reuse Ideas

What clever ideas do you have for reusing old clothing? Add your ideas to the comments section below and help us find more ways to reduce consumption and add unnecessarily to landfills.

HAPPY EARTH DAY!

Contributors

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Re-make & Re-use

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